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## Relationships on Placement: How Students and Practice Teachers View the Role of the Practice Teacher

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# Relationships on Placement

How do practice teachers and social care students view the role of the practice teacher?

Social Care Ireland, Sligo, 2015

# Background

- Finding from research in health and social care suggest the practice teacher (supervisor) plays a central role in placement experience and education:
  - Guiding and imparting knowledge (Peleg-Oren, Macgowan & Even-Zahav, 2007).
  - Passing on theory and skills and assessing students' progress (Webb, 1988).
  - Being supportive which allows the student “to feel trust and safety, enabling them to open up, question, take risks and acknowledge their difficulties without being judged” (Lefevre, 2005, p.572).
  - Reflection and feedback are fundamental to supervision to help the student become more self-aware and recognise the positive aspects of her/his practice and areas for improvement (O'Neill, 2009).

# Background

- Proposed that the view of role is affected by the model of supervision the practice teacher uses
  - Competence based - focus on the acquisition of competencies and do this by specifying goals, strategies to achieve these goals and assess progress.
  - Constructionist - help students to realise the fluidity and contextual nature of knowledge and thus reflexivity and flexibility in applying knowledge in particular contexts.

# Background

- Students and practice teachers' view may differ:
- For example:
  - Students were found to consider practice teachers who acknowledged the pressures of completing course work at the same time and being friendly and approachable more important than practice teachers did (Rodger, Fitzgerald, Davila, Millar & Allison, 2011).

# Approach

- Interpretivist – acceptance that individuals actively construct their own meanings of their realities from their experiences
  - Q methodology – compares people's 'subjectivities' regarding a phenomenon in a holistic way
  - Statements in relation to a topic generated
    - 31 statements derived from literature on practice teaching, consultation with practice teacher and students
  - Participants sort statements in relation to how important/central they see them to the topic

# Statements

- Related to:
  - Theory practice relationship
  - Providing support and encouragement to the student
  - Reflection – knowing self; open-mindedness; individuality in approach to practice; self-assessment
  - Helping with college work
  - Providing and monitoring learning
  - Policies and procedures and clients' needs
  - Knowledge, training and professional development

# Q sort - format

Most Important

Neutral

Least Important

+3

+2

+1

0

-1

-2

-3



# Participants

- Practice Teachers
  - 20 participants
  - Purposive sampling to ensure:
    - Variety in background (11/20 had degrees in social care)
    - Variety in experience in social care work
    - Variety in experience in practice teaching
  - Individual audio recorded interviews

# Participants

- Social Care Students who had completed at least two placements or nearing completion of second
  - Mixed in relation to age and previous experience
  - Opportunistic sample
  - Anonymous self completion
  - 41 completed
  - 37 completed useable sorts

# Analysis

- PQ Method downloadable from <http://schmolck.userweb.mwn.de/qmethod/>
- Calculates correlations between the set of Q sorts.
- Compares commonality and difference in entire viewpoints (Q sorts).
- By examining the pattern of correlations between Q sorts it produces common subjectivities/viewpoints.
- Meaning of common viewpoints can be judged from how the original statements relate to them.

# Practice Teachers' Viewpoints

**Practice focus with learning & reflection (11 PTs)**

Clients needs and organisational policies;  
recognition of individuality in practice;  
Accountability, learning and reflection

**Reflective, theoretical, developmental (9 PTs)**

Reflection on practice and self;  
learning in relation to students' own needs; integration of theory and practice

# Students' Viewpoints

15 Students

Practical learning & feedback; explain needs of clients; be supportive should difficulties arise; reflection on practice secondary but not on self

7 Students

Policy & client focused; being non-judgemental & supportive; learning & reflection secondary

4 Students

Theoretical & developmental; supportive yet ensure accountability;

5 Students

Personal learning; opportunities for learning & monitoring of competencies; encourage open-mindedness to different ways of practising

4 Students

Practical learning & feedback; being given knowledge; self-awareness & theoretical base secondary

# Comparisons

- The majority of students are more focused on the practical – do they see placement as an opportunity to learn and hone skills with a client group? - competence
- Practice teachers balance the needs of their client group with legal/policy frameworks while showing awareness of students' need to examine self. - constructionist

# Comparisons

- Practice teachers focus on the importance of reflection and how 'self' affects practice more than students.
- Practice teachers focus slightly more on the need for theory/practice integration.
- **But** both agree on the separation of direct college work with placement – though thematic analysis of practice teacher interviews will pinpoint subtleties.

# Comparing most popular two most important statements...

| Element  | % Students | % PTs   |
|--|------------|---------|
| Provide opportunities for learning   | 25.68 (19) | 10 (4)  |
| Provide practical feedback on practice   | 13.51 (10) | 0       |
| Be supportive should difficulties arise  | 8.1 (6)    | 0       |
| Discuss needs of clients   | 6.76 (5)   | 10 (4)  |
| Support the student to reflect on practice   | 2.7 (2)    | 20 (8)  |
| Help the student understand how their own values, beliefs and feelings affect practice | 2.7 (2)    | 15 (6)  |
| Inform the student about policies and procedures of organisation                       | 2.7 (2)    | 10 (4)  |
| Monitor the development of the student's competencies                                  | 1.35 (1)   | 7.5 (3) |
| Help with linking theoretical frameworks to practice                                   | 1.35 (1)   | 5 (2)   |
| Encourage critical examination of applicability of theories to practice                | 0          | 5 (2)   |

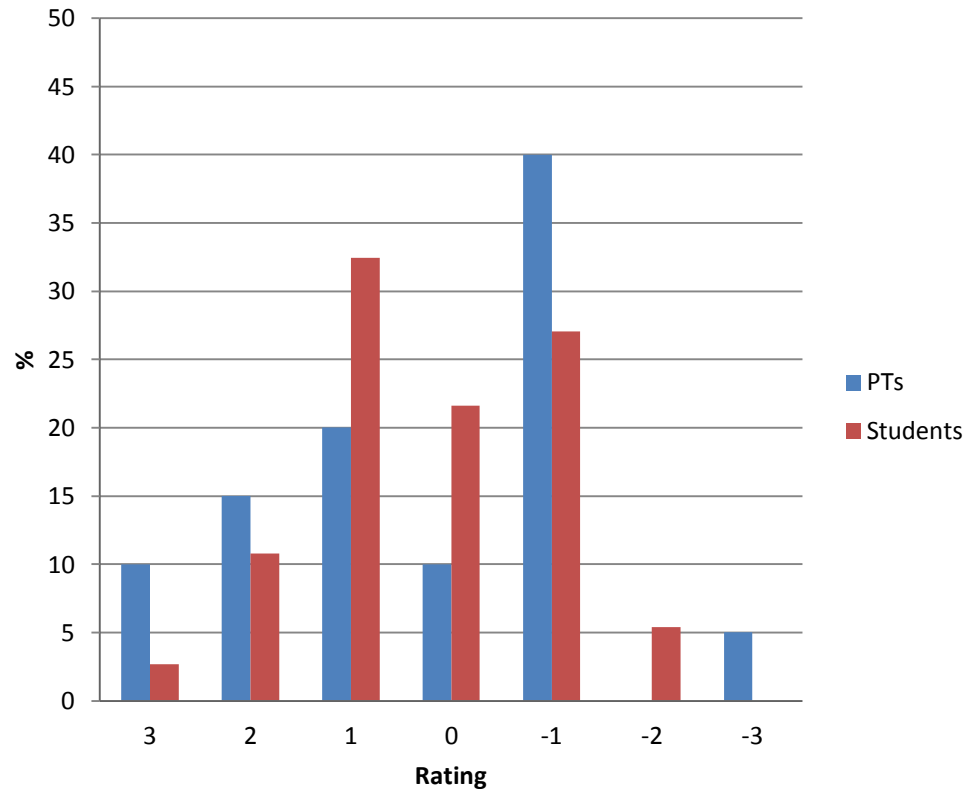


# Role of Theory

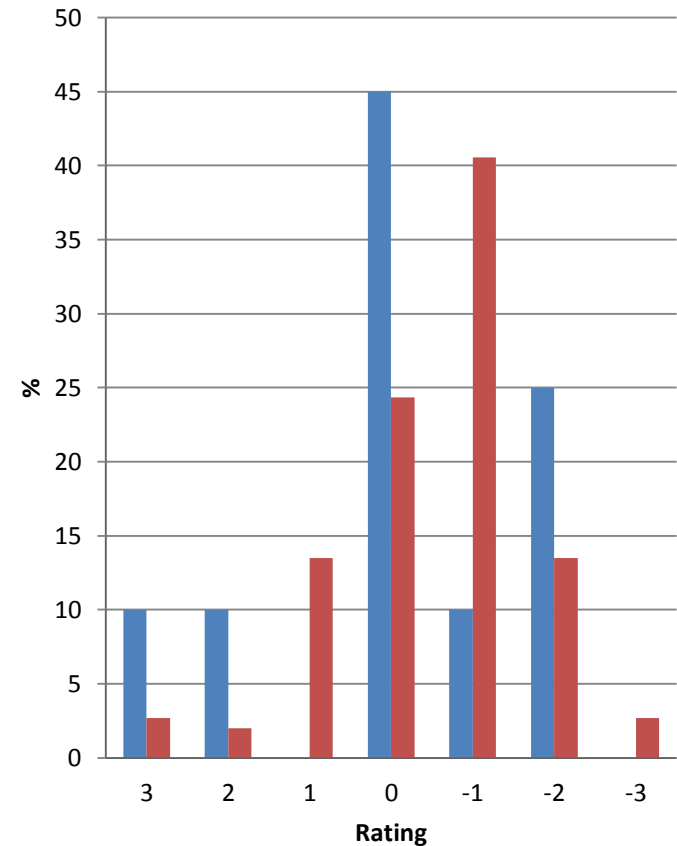
- IASCE placement guidelines suggest
  - “The Practice Placement is central to the student’s learning journey. It is where theory and practice meet.”
  - “The Placement will also provide the student with opportunities to apply theoretical aspects of social care as taught in Institute/College to actual practice.”
  - “Links between practice and theory (identify what student observes about behaviour/ policies/ approaches etc. and seek to link these to theoretical approaches e.g. why has a situation arisen?)”

# Theory and Practice

**Help with linking theoretical frameworks to practice**



**Encourage critical examination of applicability of theories to practice**



# What the practice teachers said

What they're doing on the floor is experiential and its fantastic and it really gives them a chance to see how it works but its no use if they can't link it to what they're being asked in college.

Had 'I known the attachment theory and all the components of it would I have helped that young person make different decisions?'  
'Would I have looked at their actions differently?'

I think they can only garner that through practice. [...] You have to see it yourself. And it is something that you can't pass on .

# What the practice teachers said

She's in college to learn that and I will help if they ask 'I need to find information on this'. I'd able to go this is where but I have it in my mind that the college side of things. I will facilitate it and help it but it is not top of my agenda.

I suppose I would have asked them what theories they have looked at but I wouldn't asked them 'oh how do you relate it to your practice' or pull it apart.

Obviously the theories 'cos we all work off theories here.

# Comparison to other research

- Social work students reported that PT activities such as helping integrate theory with practice, encouraging self-criticism and individualising students' learning were particularly useful. However they also reported that helping integrate theory with practice was infrequently done by PTs (Knight, 2001).
- Practice driven by managerialism and proceduralism due to child care scandals and reflection on theory is viewed as too time-consuming (Sieminski & Seden, 2011).